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Backbone & Organizational Support at the Georgia Health Policy Center

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While the concept of collaboration is not new, there is recognition that large-scale improvements in population health require formalized, cross-sector coordination. In coining the term "collective impact" back in 2011 and identifying the five, requisite factors associated with these successful collaborations, John Kania and Mark Kramer recognized the importance of "backbone support."[1]

The Georgia Health Policy Center is involved with health-related, collective impact initiatives nationally and provides evaluation, implementation, and backbone support for several ongoing collective impact projects. Backbone support provides the management and infrastructure needed to coordinate large groups around shared objectives.

This specialized coordination required for collective impact is based on achievement of five core conditions that Kania and Kramer say are necessary to achieve alignment of partners around a common goal.[1]

The Five Core Conditions of Collective Impact	
Common agenda	Participants have a shared vision for change, a common understanding of the problem, and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
Shared measurement systems	Success is measured and reported using consistent indicators for collecting data and assessing results.
Mutually reinforcing activities	Participants' efforts need not be uniform, but rather focused on a specific set of activities at which each participant excels in a way that is coordinated and supports the actions of others.
Continuous communication	This recognizes the time it takes to develop trust among participants through regular meetings and development of a common vocabulary.
Backbone support/structure	A separate entity and staff with specific skills (a supporting infrastructure) is required to manage the collective impact process.

In the years since Kania and Kramer's paper, philanthropies, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and private industry have embraced the concept of collective impact. While the potential for collective impact to address deeply entrenched, complex social problems is exciting, the field is still relatively new and lessons are slowly emerging.

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[1] Kania, J, Kramer, M. Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. 2011:36-41.

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GHPC Backbone Functions

A backbone organization provides the infrastructure and management that participating organizations may not have the available time or resources to perform. In providing backbone and organizational support, GHPC provides a combination of strategic and day-to-day administrative activities in order to effectively coordinate the work of partners to achieve a common goal. GHPC's experience, in addition to evidence from the literature[2], shows that backbone support encompasses the following functions:

- Facilitating dialogue between partners
- Managing data collection and analysis
- Maintaining internal and external communications
- Coordinating community outreach
- Mobilizing funding
- Maintaining fiduciary responsibilities
- Conducting evaluations of the effort

[2] Hanleybrown F, Kania J, Kramer M. Channeling change: Making collective impact work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. 2012:1-8.

Project Examples

Georgia's Interagency Directors Team

Georgia's Interagency Directors Team (IDT) is a multi-agency, public-private collaborative that works to promote better child and adolescent behavioral health in the state.

Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities established IDT to create an integrated approach to policy and practice within the child and adolescent System of Care. IDT consists of more than 20 representatives from state agencies and non-governmental organizations that serve children with behavioral health needs.

As part of providing backbone support to IDT, GHPC provides comprehensive strategic research to support IDT's yearly strategic System of Care goals. GHPC's has provided IDT with data compilation and policy analysis in the areas of juvenile justice reform; services and supports for emerging adults; and appropriate service provision for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among young children.

Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement

The Atlanta Regional Collaborative for Health Improvement (ARCHI) has worked to improve health for people in the Atlanta region since 2011. ARCHI is developing silo-busting solutions that address the root causes of health disparities by engaging cross-sector partners committed to making regional health, social, economic, and educational investments for social change. ARCHI is backed by 70-plus organizations, including hospitals, public health agencies, regional planning groups, non-profit and philanthropic organizations, and community members from across the metro area.

GHPC was one of the initial conveners of what would become ARCHI, along with the Atlanta Regional Commission and the United Way of Greater Atlanta. The three organizations continue to serve on the executive leadership team, which provides ongoing organizational and backbone support. GHPC works with the ARCHI partners to nurture alignment with ARCHI's priorities, promote ARCHI's vision, and provide project management, including designing and convening meetings.